

appeared to be under the influence of deep agitation. His face no longer wore its usual open, careless expression, but the brow was contracted and the lips compressed, while ever and anon he arrested his hasty steps, and glancing towards the door, listened as if expecting some one whose presence was anxiously desired. At length his impatience was rewarded; a light footstep approached and Ellen Douglas entered the room. As she entered, an expression of joy stole over the hitherto disturbed face of Charles, and drawing a chair near the fire, he begged her to be seated.

"At length, Miss Douglas, you have come," he began; "you know not the suspense, the agony, I have experienced while waiting for you, uncertain whether you might grant the interview I so eagerly desired."

"My mother has but now fallen asleep," replied Ellen, "and it was impossible for me to leave her sooner. Now that I am here, Mr. O'Donnell, I beg you will let me know why you desired to see me, that I may return to her, for were she to awaken, she would wonder at my absence."

"Ellen! you know not the powerful motive which urged me to solicit your presence this night; but it will require time to reveal all I have to say. Be seated then, and listen to the important communication—important at least to me—which awaits you; for the answer you give will determine my happiness or misery upon this earth."

Astonished at the emotion with which Charles uttered these words, Ellen hastily seated herself, and bent towards him in a listening attitude, while the varying expression of her face betrayed the interest she felt in what she was about to hear.

"Ellen," he began, "perhaps I may be wrong; my vanity may have led me astray when it has whispered to me that you feel an interest in the stranger who dwells beneath your mother's roof. Pardon me, if I am tedious, but I implore your patience while I relate to you the history of my past life, without concealment, without disguise."

And Charles briefly recounted to her the orphan state in which he had been left, and the happy home and parental affection which had watched over him at Ardmore. Of Constance, also, he spoke; of her childish love and influence over the wayward boy, and as he dwelt upon her virtues, he observed the face of Ellen Douglas wear a troubled expression, and her eye scan his countenance narrowly, as if to detect whether it was merely a brotherly regard which he entertained for a being so young and fair. As Charles came to this portion of his recital he hastily drew forth an ivory

tablet, upon which was represented the placid features of Constance Fitzgerald.

"Ellen! behold the companion of my early years," he said, as he gave the miniature into her hand, "and tell me whether you have ever beheld a face more eloquent in its still and silent beauty, or more likely to win love and retain it."

"Lovely! most lovely!" exclaimed Ellen, as, forgetful of the apprehensions which had lately disturbed her mind, she drank in the quiet beauty of that contemplative face, which seemed to look upon her with a melancholy smile. She continued gazing upon it while Charles proceeded:

"Ellen! till I beheld you, I imagined that earth contained not a brighter nor a dearer object than she whom you see but feebly portrayed there; but since I first saw you——," and Charles here related the manner in which he had twice beheld her beside the ruined Chapel.

"Since that day upon which you first met my gaze, Ellen," he continued, "your image has haunted me, and although it was forgotten in the presence of Constance, it was only to revive when I was left alone. My love for that fair girl, the companion of my boyhood, partook not of the nature of the passion I bear to you, dear Ellen! When I think of her, it is with a feeling of calm, undisturbed affection, but towards you my love has been far different. Absent from you I cannot exist. Life has lost its charm for me if you turn a cold ear to my proffered love. Nay, Ellen! do not avert thy face, but let me look into the clear depths of thine eyes, whilst thou tell'st me that I will be happy. For without thee misery must be my portion."

And Ellen did turn her eyes upon O'Donnell, unembarrassed, and with a calm, untroubled glance, while she said in the lowest tones:

"O'Donnell, will you answer me one question ere I reply to thine?"

"Speak then, Ellen," replied Charles hastily, "and it shall not remain unanswered."

"Tell me, Charles," she said, while her voice sounded low and impressive, "whether you are bound by any promise, by any vow, to that fair girl whose gentle face looks calm as an angel's upon you, and witnesses your truth or your faithlessness. Speak, Charles! and conceal not the truth from me."

"Ellen," replied O'Donnell, "I solemnly vow that I break neither pledge nor plighted troth when I ask thee to bestow thy love upon one who, until now, has never breathed words of love to woman."

The air of solemnity which had hitherto lent a lofty character to Ellen's face gradually desert-